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DR. CARRICK.

BY M. E. BRADDON.

CHAPTER I. THE DOCTOR.

DR. CARRICK was a man of genius whose life had been a failure. On his five-and-forty birthday he looked back, with a gloomy gaze, upon a career that had not been brightened by one solitary success. Most men have their intervals of good luck, but in the desert of this man's life there had been no green spot. People spoke well of him, lauded him for his high principles and rugged honesty, but they began to call him poor Carrick. That was bitter.

He had practised as a physician in many places. First in a quiet country town, where he kept his gig, and pinched himself in order to feed his horse, and where he simulated success by the respectability of his appearance and surroundings. But the cost of his house and servants, his horse and gig, sleek broadcloth and fine linen, crushed him. He succumbed under the severe proprieties of provincial life, and went to London, thinking to find there a wider field for his abilities.

He found the field wide enough, so wide indeed that nobody seemed aware of his existence. If he had been a clever quack who made bread pills, he might have advertised his way to fortune; but he was only a man who had adopted a difficult profession from sheer love of science, and

who asked for nothing better than to be able to live by his talent, and to go on extending his experience and adding to his knowledge.

Dr. Carrick tried London, from the western suburbs to the heights of Pentonville, from Bloomsbury to Blackfriars, from Lambeth to Bow, and he left it, after fifteen weary years, as poor a man as when he entered that stony wilderness, save for a legacy of three hundred and forty pounds from an octogenarian great-aunt, whose very existence he had forgotten till this godsend dropped into his lap.

His professional labours in the metropolis had given him just a bare livelihood. He was a man of exceptional temperance and self-denial, and could live upon a pittance which, for a less Spartan mind, would have meant starvation. He left London without a debt, and with a decent coat on his back; and perhaps the monster city, beneath whose feet many a pearl is flung to be trampled into the mire, has seldom cast out of its bosom, unknown and unvalued, a cleverer man than Theodore Carrick.

That legacy—the first boon which fortune had ever bestowed upon him—was a turning-point in Dr. Carrick's life. It can hardly be said to have made him richer, for, with the three hundred and forty pounds, his great-aunt had left him something else—a distant cousin of two-and-twenty, a gentle, patient, willing girl, with a pale placid face, dark hazel eyes, and dark brown hair, that had a tinge of

ruddy gold in the sunshine. This fourth or fifth cousin of the doctor's was one of those waifs, which the sea of life is always throwing up on the bleak shores of adversity. No shipwrecked princess in sweet Shakespearian story, was ever more helpless and alone than Hester Rushton at the beginning of life. Old Mrs. Hedger, hearing of the untimely end of the girl's parents, had taken her at the age of twelve, as companion, protégée, drudge, and victim. As a child, Hester had endured the old lady's tempers with unvarying patience; as a girl she had waited upon her, and nursed her with unflinching care. But she never learned to flatter or to fawn, so Mrs. Hedger left her old servant Betty a thousand pounds, and Hester only a hundred.

When Dr. Carrick went down to the little Hertfordshire village to attend his aunt's funeral, in the character of a grateful legatee, he found Hester Rushton among the other goods and chattels in the house of death, and with very little more idea as to her future destiny than the chairs and tables, which were to be sold by the auctioneer on the following Monday.

"And what are you going to do, Miss Rushton?" asked Dr. Carrick, when the funeral was over.

"I don't know," said Hester simply.

And then the tears came into her eyes at the thought of her loneliness. The old lady had never been particularly kind to her, but she had given her lodging, and food, and raiment; and life, though joyless, had been sheltered from the bleak winds of misfortune.

"I suppose I shall go and live—somewhere," said Hester vaguely. "I can get a room in the village for four shillings a week, and perhaps I might get some children to teach—very little children, who would not want to learn much."

"I think you had much better come and live with me," said Dr. Carrick. "I am going to buy a country practice, somewhere in the West of England, where living is cheap; you can come and keep house for me."

Hester accepted the offer as frankly as it was made.

"Do you really think I could be useful to you?" she asked. "I used to look after the house, and indeed do a good deal of the house-work for aunt Hedger, but, I shouldn't like to be a burden to you," concluded Hester, very seriously. She

was a conscientious little thing, and had never had a selfish thought in her life.

The idea that it might not be strictly correct, or in accordance with the laws of society, that a young lady of two-and-twenty should keep house for a gentleman of five-and-forty, never entered her mind. Her only anxiety was not to impose upon her cousin Carrick's goodness.

"You will not be a burden to me," answered Dr. Carrick. "Poor as I am, I have always been cheated by my servants. Yes, even when I have been so low in the world as to have nobody but a charwoman, that charwoman has stolen my coals, and taken toll of my tea and sugar. You will save me more than you will cost me."

So it came to pass that Dr. Carrick gave a hundred and fifty pounds for a practice in a Cornish village, within half-a-dozen miles of Penzance, and set up house-keeping in a roomy old house, on a hill above the broad Atlantic; a house whose windows looked down upon a wild rock-bound shore, where the wide-winged cormorants perched upon the craggy pinnacles of serpentine, and where the sea in sunny weather wore the changeful colours of a dolphin's back.

CHAPTER II. HIS PATIENT.

For the first three years, Dr. Carrick's life at the village of St. Hildred was, like all that had gone before it, a hard struggle for the bare necessities of existence. Provisions were cheap at St. Hildred, and it was the fashion to live simply, or else in those first years the doctor could hardly have lived at all. He soon won for himself a reputation for skill in his profession, and people believed in that grave earnest manner of his, the dark deep-set eyes, pale passionless face, and high bald brow. He was more respected than liked by the lower orders, while he was too grave and wise for the fox-hunting squires and their homely wives; but, happily, all agreed in believing him clever, so that by the end of those probationary years, he had acquired a practice which just enabled him to maintain his small household decently, keep his horse, and indulge himself with a new suit of clothes once a year.

This was not much to have gained at the end of eight-and-twenty years of toil and study, and anyone who looked in the doctor's face, could see there the stamp of a disappointed life. His spirits had sunk into a settled melancholy, from which he rarely took the trouble to rouse himself.

In his professional work his manner was quick, decisive, trenchant; at home he gave himself up to thought and study.

Hester—or Hettie as she was more familiarly called—had proved a domestic treasure. She kept the big, rambling old house as neat as a new pin, with only the aid of a ruddy-cheeked buxom Cornish girl, whose wages were five pounds a year. She had brightened up the old furniture—left by the doctor's predecessor, and bought cheap by the doctor—in such a marvellous way, that the clumsy old chairs and tables looked almost handsome. The bedrooms, with their low ceilings, wide fireplaces, huge four-post bedsteads, and dark damask draperies, had a gloom which even her art could not dispel; and there were abiding shadows on the darksome old staircase, and in the long narrow corridors, that suggested ghostly visitors. Indeed, it was because the house had long enjoyed the reputation of being haunted, that the doctor had taken it. The Cornish mind was averse from ghosts, so the rent of St. Hildred House was almost ridiculously small.

One bleak March evening, Dr. Carrick was summoned to a patient at a distance. The night was wild and rough for a long ride upon a lonely road, and the doctor was tired after his day's work; but the words Tregonnell Manor, pronounced by the rosy-faced maid-of-all-work, acted like a charm. He started up from his comfortable armchair, flung his book aside, and went out into the dimly-lighted hall. The door was open, and a man on horseback was waiting in front of it.

"Has Mr. Tregonnell come back to the manor?" asked the doctor.

"Yes, sir. Master came home this morning. He's not been well for some time—a nasty low fever hanging about him—but he kept out with his yacht as long as he could, coasting about Spain and the south of France. Yesterday we put in at Plymouth, and came home early this morning by the night coach. He's looking right-down bad, and he sent me to ask you to ride over."

"I'll come directly. Is there a medicine-chest at Tregonnell?"

"There be a chest, I know; but I can't say as there's anything in it."

"I'd better bring what I'm likely to want. I'll go and saddle my horse."

Throughout his residence at St. Hildred, the doctor had groomed his horse. There

was no horse better groomed or better fed in the neighbourhood.

Tregonnell Manor was the most important place between the Land's End and the Lizard; a good old house of the Elizabethan period, with a fine estate attached to it. The Tregonnells, once a large family, had dwindled down to a single descendant, a bachelor of three-and-thirty, who was rumoured to have lived a wild life in London and other great cities, to have made shipwreck of a fine constitution, and to be not altogether right in his mind. His appearances at Tregonnell Manor were fitful and unexpected. He never stayed there long, and he never seemed to know what to do with his life when he was there. He avoided all society, and his only pleasure appeared to be in yachting. He was an excellent sailor, commanded his own yacht, and went everywhere, from the Start Point to the Black Sea.

Dr. Carrick had heard a great deal about this Squire Tregonnell—the last of the good old Tregonnell race—men who had worn sword and gown, and had played their part in every great struggle, from the Wars of the Roses to the Battle of the Boyne. He knew that Eustace Tregonnell was one of the richest men in this part of the country. A valuable patient for a struggling physician, assuredly.

The stable clock at Tregonnell Manor was striking ten, as the doctor and the groom rode in at the open gate between tall stone pillars crowned with the Tregonnell escutcheon. By the half light of a waning moon, drifting in a sea of clouds, the grounds of the manor-house looked gloomy and unbecomingly, the house itself sombre and uninviting. Within, all had the same air of abiding gloom. The dark oak walls and old pictures, the rusty armour, the low ceilings, and deep-set doors were unbrightened by any of the signs of occupation or family life. Tregonnell Manor looked what it was, the house of a man who had never found, or hoped to find, happiness in his home. An old servant opened a door and ushered the doctor into a large room, lined with books. Mr. Tregonnell sat by the wide hearth, where the neglected logs were dropping into gray ash, a small table with a reading-lamp by his side. This lamp was the only light in the room. It illuminated the table and a narrow circle round it, and left all else in deep shadow.

"Good evening, doctor," said Mr. Tre-

gonnell, pleasantly enough, shutting his book, and motioning the doctor to a chair on the opposite side of the hearth.

The face which he turned to Dr. Carrick was a remarkable and an interesting one. Ruins are always interesting; and this face was the ruin of one of the handsomest faces Dr. Carrick had ever seen. A face pale as marble, eyes of that dark gray which looks black, a broad brow, whose whiteness was made more striking by the blackness of the thick short hair that framed it, features well and firmly carved, and about all an expression of intense melancholy—that utter weariness of life, which is more difficult to cure than any other form of depression. Premature lines marked the broad brow, the cheeks were hollow, the eyes wan and haggard. If this man were indeed the last and sole representative of the Tregonnell race, that race seemed in sore danger of extinction.

Dr. Carrick felt his new patient's pulse, and looked at him thoughtfully for a minute or so, in the vivid light of the reading-lamp.

He made none of the stereotyped enquiries.

"What is the matter with you?" he asked bluntly. "You know much better than I can tell you."

"A restlessness that impels me to be continually shifting the scene of my life; an indescribable disgust at everything, and a hatred of all places; a feeling that I have lived too long, and yet that I don't quite want to die."

"You have made a mistake common to young men who have fine constitutions and fine fortunes. You have fancied both inexhaustible."

"I have been extravagant, but I have hardly spent my income," answered Mr. Tregonnell frankly; "but I dare say I have used my constitution rather badly. I had a disappointment early in life—I dare say you have heard the story. I wanted to marry a woman whom my father was pleased to call my inferior, though she was as much my superior then as a woman, as she is now as a sinless soul in paradise. He gave me a yacht, for which I had been longing, and sent me abroad to cure myself of my fancy. I was happy enough in the bustle and variety of my life, thinking that things would work round in time, and that I should come home and find my darling true to me, and my father more indulgent. I wrote to her from every port, and in every letter told her the same

story. We had only to be true to each other, and to wait for happier days. I should wait, if need were, till my hair grew gray. I was away a year, and my life during all that time was such a wandering one, that it was no surprise to me to find my letters unanswered. When I came back, I found a grave, and discovered later, that my sweet girl had been sent to drudge as an articled pupil in a school at Exeter. Not one of my letters had been given to her. They would only have unsettled her, her wicked old hag of a grandmother told me. I knew afterwards, that my father had bought her people over to his interests. She had no mother. Her father was a weak-minded sot; her grandmother a greedy time-serving old harridan. Between them they killed her, and broke my heart. That was the beginning of my wild career, Dr. Carrick. Not a very cheerful one, was it?"

"A common story, I fear."

"Yes; wrecked and ruined lives are common enough, I dare say. They fill the Haymarket, and keep gambling-houses going, and swell the excise. I went to London after my father's death, and from London to Paris, and from Paris to Vienna. There is very little wildness or wickedness in those three cities, that I could not enlighten you about. A man cannot touch pitch without defilement. I didn't steep myself to the lips in pitch, or wallow in it, and enjoy it as some men do; but I touched it, and the taint cleaves to me. There is nothing in this world that men call pleasure, which has the faintest charm for me. My nights are restless, and troubled with feverish dreams. And sometimes—sometimes—I start up with a sudden thrill of horror going through me like an arrow, and feel as if the hair of my head were lifted up, like Job's, at a vision of hideous fear."

"What is it you fear?"

"Madness," answered Estace Tregonnell, in a half-whisper. "It has appeared more than once in my family. My grandfather died mad. Sometimes I fancy that I can feel it coming. It has seemed near at hand, even. I have looked in the glass, started at my haggard face, hardly recognising myself, and have cried out involuntarily: 'That is the face of a madman!'"

"A not unnatural result of sleepless and troubled nights," answered the doctor quietly. "Do you know that a week's insomnia—one little week absolutely without sleep—has been known to result in

temporary lunacy? That was an extreme case, of course; but the man who can't sleep comfortably is always in a bad way. You must have refreshing sleep, Mr. Tregonnell, or your fears may be realised."

"Where are the drugs that will give it me? I have tried them all. The sole effect of opiates is to send me into a fever, and to make me twice as wakeful as I am without them."

"I should not recommend opiates in your case."

"What would you recommend then?"

"Mesmerism."

Mr. Tregonnell smiled, a smile at once contemptuous and impatient.

"I sent for a physician, whose sagacity I have heard highly lauded. I did not expect to meet—"

"A quack," said Dr. Carrick. "Yes, I know that mesmerism ranks with table-turning and other juggleries. A striking proof of the ignorance of the popular mind upon all scientific questions outside the narrow range of old-established orthodoxy."

And then Dr. Carrick went on to discourse eloquently upon mesmerism as a curative agent. He told Mr. Tregonnell about Dr. Esdaile's experiments in the native hospital in Calcutta; he argued warmly in favour of an influence which was evidently with him a favourite subject of study.

"Have you tried this wonderful agent upon any of your Cornish patients?" asked Mr. Tregonnell.

"I am not such a fool. A century ago they would have punished mesmerism under the head of witchcraft, to-day they would scout it as quackery. I talk freely to you, because I take you for a reasonable and enlightened being."

"Do you think I am a subject for mesmerism?"

"I know you are, and an excellent one."

"Mesmerise me, then," said Mr. Tregonnell quietly, throwing himself back in his chair, and fixing his dark haggard eyes upon the doctor.

"In this house? Impossible! I should throw you into a sleep which would last for hours; a sleep of deepest unconsciousness, from which the loudest noises would not awaken you; a sleep in which you would be even insensible to pain. Your servants would take alarm. My coming and going might seem strange; and, in short, if I am to cure you by means of mesmerism, as I know I can—yes, tame that wild fever of your blood, reduce that

unhealthy restlessness to placid repose, banish fears which are not wholly groundless; in a word, give you that which ancient philosophy counted as the highest good, a sane mind in a sound body—if I am to do all this, Mr. Tregonnell, I must have the case in my own hands. I must have you under my care by day and night. My house is large and commodious. You must come and live with me."

"Humph!" muttered Mr. Tregonnell. "Is not that rather like going into a private lunatic asylum?"

"My house is not registered as an asylum, and I never had a lunatic in my care. No, Mr. Tregonnell; you will be farther from lunacy under my roof than you are here, eating your heart out by this dismal fireside."

"Yes, it is dismal; the sort of house that ought to be occupied by a large family. Well, I am half inclined to come to you. I shall be a free agent in your house, I conclude; able to roam about as I like by day, provided I keep decent hours at night. You will put no restraint upon my movements?"

"None."

"Can you find room for my horse and for my servant?"

"For both."

"Then I will come. Mind, I do not promise to stay with you for any given time. I must be free as the wind. If you can give me sound and peaceful sleep with your mesmeric passes, I shall be grateful to you—and mesmerism. But can you not give me a taste of your quality at once, here?"

"No; I am expected home. If I mesmerised you to-night, I should want to stay with you to see the result of my experiment. Come to me for a week. If by the end of that time your spirits are not tranquillised, and your general health is not improved, call me a charlatan, and have done with me."

"I am very much inclined to believe in you," said Mr. Tregonnell, gazing steadily at the doctor. "You look as if you were in earnest."

"I have been in earnest all my life," answered Dr. Carrick. And then inwardly he added: "But I never had an object worth being in earnest about until to-night."

CHAPTER III. HESTER FINDS A FRIEND.

THE best rooms in St. Hildred House were swept and garnished for Squire Tregonnell. Hester Rushton, who had

a natural womanly love of household duties, was in her element while she bustled about, polishing, dusting, and arranging things for the reception of an honoured inmate. She caught herself singing at her work that busy morning, with a sense of pleasant expectation that was new and sweet. It was a relief to think of a stranger coming to live in that big empty house. Dr. Carrick was of so reserved a temper, that Hester seemed no more intimate with him now, after three years' domestic companionship, than on the day of her aunt's funeral. She could complain of no unkindness. He never spoke harshly to her, even when most troubled in mind. He thanked her courteously for all her attentions; praised her economies and clever management of his house; but he gave her none of his confidence. She felt that she knew no more of his heart and mind than if he had been a man of stone.

About his new patient, Dr. Carrick had told his cousin only that he was a man of wealth and position; that he was to have the best rooms in the house; and that his valet was to be made comfortable in the servants' offices. Hester was more frightened at the idea of the valet than at the grandeur of the master.

Happily, Mr. Tregonnell's body-servant was not a pampered cockney, corrupted by the luxurious idleness of chambers in the Albany, but a clever handy fellow, used to roughing it on board his master's yacht, and with a genius for every art that can make the wheels of daily life work smoothly. He was a first-rate cook, and an accomplished butler; and took upon himself all those delicate labours which were beyond the power of Dr. Carrick's maid-of-all-work.

Mr. Tregonnell stayed out the week, and looked considerably better and brighter at the end of it. He spent his mornings in roaming about the cliffs, or riding in the Cornish lanes; his afternoons in reading; his evenings in the society of Dr. Carrick and Miss Rushton. He was a man who had seen men and cities, and read much. His conversation, therefore, was full of interest; and Hester, to whom all intellectual conversation was new, listened with unvarying delight. It was to be observed, however, that he never talked of himself.

The week ended, and Mr. Tregonnell had no wish to return to the manor. He now firmly believed in the power of animal magnetism. Nightly, in the silence of

his bedchamber, the doctor exercised his potent, but seeming simple art. A steady pressure of his hands upon the shoulders of the patient, a series of mystic passes before the dreamy eyes, and the charm worked. First a new sense of warmth, comfort, and lightness stole through the frame; then the heavy eyelids drooped involuntarily, the will lost its waking power; then came deep, prolonged, and restful sleep, bringing healing and regeneration to mind and body.

This treatment was known to none save the patient and the physician. David Skelter, the valet, had never been in very close attendance upon his master, who was a man of independent habits. His bedroom was on an upper floor, remote from Mr. Tregonnell's apartment, and the valet saw nothing of his master after he had arranged his room for the night.

Hester Rushton's ideas as to the treatment of the patient were of the vaguest. Dr. Carrick had told her only that Mr. Tregonnell required rest and retirement.

So the days went on, and Hester's life took a new colour from the presence of a man of intellect and refinement, who treated her as a being of equal intelligence, and opened his mind to her freely on all subjects that were not personal. Of his opinions she knew much, of himself very little.

Spring advanced. The blustery March winds softened into the gentle breezes of April. St. Hildred House had a good old-fashioned garden—a garden where departed generations had planted homely flowers, which blossomed year after year, unaided by the gardener's art. Everything about the place had been sorely neglected till Hester came, but this garden was her chief delight. Her household duties occupied her all the morning, but she spent every fine afternoon in the garden—her bright young hand bared to the spring breeze, her clever little hands encased in thick gardening-gloves—digging, transplanting, weeding, clipping, pruning, with skill that would have done credit to a professed gardener. Labour was cheap at St. Hildred, and for sixpence a day she could get a boy to mow the grass and roll the gravel-walks once a week or so; an extravagance which the doctor hardly approved.

Mr. Tregonnell's sitting-room looked into the garden. One warm afternoon, towards the close of May, he threw aside his book, and went downstairs to join

Hester, who was budding a rose on the lawn.

"How fond you seem to be of this garden of yours, Miss Rushton," he said at her elbow.

His footfall had been noiseless on the thick soft grass, and his speech startled her. The cheek—turned a little from him, but not so far but that he could see its change of colour—flushed crimson, and the scissors shook in her hand.

"How you startled me!" she exclaimed. "You don't know what a critical business budding is."

"It looks rather like a surgical operation. Did Dr. Carrick teach you?"

"Dr. Carrick!" laughed Hester. "I don't think he knows a rose from a dandelion, except when he uses them in medicine. No; it was a dear, deaf old gardener in Hertfordshire who taught me, years and years ago."

"Years and years ago," echoed Mr. Tregonnell. "What an eternity of time you seem to express by that phrase. Pray how many centuries old may you be, Miss Rushton?"

"In actual years I believe I am twenty-five," answered Hester, smiling; "but I feel dreadfully old. I suppose it is because I have known a great deal of sorrow. I don't mean to complain. Indeed, I should be very wicked if I did; for my aunt Hedger and my cousin Carrick have both been very good to me; but it is hard to lose those one fondly loves in the morning of life."

"It is," assented Mr. Tregonnell earnestly. "I have known that loss, Miss Rushton, and it has made me what you see—a man without aim or purpose in life—a mere waif to drift about in a yacht, buffeted by the winds and waves, and caring very little what port I put into, or whether I go down some stormy night in mid-ocean, unlamented and unknown. And you, too, have drawn a mournful lot out of the urn, have you, little one?"

"I lost my father and mother when I was fourteen. They both died in the same week. Dear, dear papa was a curate in a Bedfordshire village. A fever broke out, and he took it, and then mamma. It was all like a dreadful dream. In a week they were gone, and I was alone with two coffins. Then aunt Hedger sent for me, and I lived with her. She was old and ailing when I went to her. Her life seemed like one long illness, and then the

end came, and I was alone again. I haven't the least idea what would have become of me if cousin Carrick had not asked me to come and take care of his house."

"You are very much attached to Dr. Carrick, I suppose," said Mr. Tregonnell, looking at her searchingly.

He was wondering whether any hidden evil lurked beneath this outward simplicity; whether the relations between the doctor and his cousin were pure and free from guile.

"He has been very good to me," answered Hester innocently.

"And you like him very much, no doubt?"

"I like him as much as he will let me. He is my benefactor. I should be base and ungrateful if I did not honour him. I do, for his kindness to me, and for his patience and fortitude, and skill in his profession. I see how much good he does. But he is as much a stranger to me now as when first I crossed the threshold of his house. It is his nature to live alone."

This speech made Mr. Tregonnell thoughtful. He remembered a line of Schiller's:

Fear all things in which there is an unknown depth.

Yet what had he to fear from Dr. Carrick?

All the doctor could possibly desire from him was liberal payment for service rendered, and to have his praises sounded in the neighbourhood by a grateful patient. Mr. Tregonnell had already pressed a cheque for a hundred pounds upon the doctor's acceptance, and had found it difficult to persuade him to receive so large a fee. There was to all appearance no desire to take advantage of his natural recklessness.

Henceforward it became quite a usual thing for Mr. Tregonnell to loiter in the garden, while Hester worked with her pruning-scissors or trowel. He even volunteered his assistance, but Hester laughed at his offer, and declined such clumsy help. They became very confidential during those sunny afternoons; Hester telling the doctor's patient all about her happy childhood, and sad girlhood, freely confessing her want of education, and her ardent desire to learn. Mr. Tregonnell rode over to the manor one morning to select a heap of volumes for her instruction, and ordered them to be sent to St. Hildred House the same day. He took as much pains to choose books that would at once arouse her interest, as if he

had been a father catering for a favourite child.

Sometimes, when the fair May afternoons were especially tempting, he insisted upon Hester's going down to the beach with him; and they idled together upon the rugged strand, picking up masses of many-coloured seaweed, watching the black cormorants perching on the rocky pinnacles, and listening to the great strong voice of the sea. It was altogether a new life for simple Hester Rushton, but the firm fresh young mind was in no wise injured by the association. The clever little housekeeper performed her daily tasks just as diligently as of old. The eager young student, to whom all the world of intellect was new, only applied herself to her books when her domestic duties were done.

CHAPTER IV. MR. TREGONNELL MAKES HIS WILL.

WHILE the acquaintance between Mr. Tregonnell and Hester Rushton thus ripened gradually into a very close friendship, Dr. Carrick was too busily occupied by his daily round of professional work to be aware of the change. He was away from home all day. When he saw his cousin and his patient in the evening, he perceived no more than that they got on very well together. This was as it should be. He wished his patient to be comfortable in his house. Mr. Tregonnell had now been with him three months, and had pressed a second cheque for a hundred pounds upon his acceptance. This was very well, and Dr. Carrick felt that if it could go on for ever his fortune would be made. But how could he hope that the thing would last? Eustace Tregonnell's fitful temper was proverbial. Some morning he would feel the old longing for the wide salt sea, and be off and away in his yacht, leaving the doctor as desolate as Dido. Dr. Carrick's only wonder was that his patient had stayed so long. It never entered into his mind that Hester Rushton's hazel eyes and gentle child-like ways could have any influence upon Mr. Tregonnell. Even the valet noticed the change which his new mode of life had wrought in his master. He talked of it in the village, and lauded Dr. Carrick's skill.

"He's the first doctor that ever did Mr. Tregonnell any good," he said, leaning over the counter of the chief shopkeeper in St. Hildred—grocer, chemist, stationer, and postmaster—for a com-

fortable gossip. "I never saw anybody so tamed down and quieted as master. He used to be all fits and starts, and as restless as if life was a burden to him. Now he seems to find pleasure in the simplest things."

"Ah," said the shopkeeper, "he's been a wild one, I reckon. The Tregonnells always were wild. It's in the blood. But he hasn't been taking any more chloroform, I hope. That's a dangerous habit."

"What do you mean?" asked David.

"Why, he's been in the habit of taking chloroform for pains in his head. You must know that, surely. Dr. Carrick warned me not to sell him any, if he should come here for it."

"I don't know anything about his taking chloroform," said David. "I know he's taken all sorts of things on board his yacht, to make him sleep; but I never heard of his taking chloroform in particular. He's got a little bottle in his medicine-chest, but I don't believe he's ever taken the stopper out."

"Ah," said the village trader, "that's all you know about it. Dr. Carrick warned me against letting him have chloroform, and there was that in the doctor's manner which made me think it was a serious matter."

David Skelter ruminated upon this disclosure of the shopman's. His sturdy English self-respect was offended at the idea of Dr. Carrick's interference with his master's liberty. That any man should go behind Mr. Tregonnell's back, and warn a shopkeeper against treating him as a reasonable being, roused the faithful David's indignation. It was treating the master of Tregonnell Manor like a lunatic.

That evening, after he had arranged his master's room for the night, David looked at the medicine-chest, which had been brought from the manor with Mr. Tregonnell's effects, and stood on the dressing-table, unlocked.

There was the little bottle of chloroform, three-parts full. David remembered his master sending him to get it at a chemist's in Genoa, three years ago, when he was suffering from spasmodic pains in the head. The bottle was carefully stoppered.

"I don't believe master has ever opened it since we left Genoa," David said to himself.

A few days after this Mr. Tregonnell began to talk of his yacht, ominously for Dr. Carrick. It was just the weather for a cruise, neither too cold nor too hot.

"I shan't go far afield," said Mr. Tregonnell; "but I feel that a breath of the sea would do me good. I shall go and cruise about the Scilly Isles, for a week or so, or perhaps sail as far as Madeira, and then come back and settle down again."

David, who was of a roving temper, was delighted at the idea of getting to sea again. His master sent him to Falmouth next day, to buy certain things that were wanted on board the *Water Fay*.

Mr. Tregonnell went to his room a little earlier than usual upon the evening after David's departure. He had ridden a long way that day, and his horse had been restive and troublesome. He had come home late in the afternoon, much fatigued.

"Oh, by-the-way, Hester," said Dr. Carrick, after his cousin had wished him good-night, "I must ask you not to go to bed just yet, and you can tell Betsy to wait up for an hour or so. I shall want you both in Mr. Tregonnell's room for a minute or two, to witness a deed he is going to execute."

Hester looked puzzled.

"Mr. Tregonnell did not say anything —," she began.

"No; he forgot that the deed would require to be witnessed. He is not very business-like in his habits. The fact is, Hester—it would be a foolish delicacy to withhold the truth from you—Mr. Tregonnell has taken a very noble view of the professional services I have rendered him. He is going to make his will before he goes to sea, and he intends to put me in for a handsome legacy. Of course, taking into consideration the difference in our ages, it is to the last degree improbable that I shall live to profit by his generous intention, but I am not the less grateful."

"It is very good of him," said Hester thoughtfully; "but I wonder that he, who is so careless about all business matters, and so indifferent to money, should think of making his will."

"It is a thing that every man ought to do, and which a man must be an idiot if he neglects to do. Especially a man in Mr. Tregonnell's position, whose property would go to some remote heir-at-law, or possibly to the Crown. Remember he is the last of his race!"

"How sad that seems!" sighed Hester.

She, too, had every reason to believe herself the last frail sprig upon a withered tree. She knew of no kinsman living, save this distant cousin, who had sheltered her.

An hour later, Dr. Carrick summoned

Hester and the servant Betsy to Mr. Tregonnell's sitting-room. Eustace Tregonnell was seated in front of the table at which he usually read and wrote. The shaded reading-lamp threw its light on the papers lying on the table, and left all things else in shadow.

Dr. Carrick stood beside his patient.

"Now sign," he said, with his fingers laid lightly on Mr. Tregonnell's wrist.

Mr. Tregonnell signed the paper before him.

"This is Mr. Tregonnell's will," said Dr. Carrick to the two girls, "written entirely in his own hand, upon a single sheet of paper. You, Hester Rushton, and you, Betsy Thomas, are now to sign as witnesses."

He showed them where they were to put their names, still standing by his patient's chair. Hester had not seen Mr. Tregonnell's face since she entered the room.

She signed her name as the doctor directed, and Betsy signed after her.

"You acknowledge this as your will," said the doctor to Mr. Tregonnell.

"I acknowledge this as my will," repeated the patient.

"That is all. Good-night, Hester; good-night, Betsy. Remember you are neither of you to mention this business of to-night to anybody. Mr. Tregonnell doesn't want it talked about."

CHAPTER V. MYSTERY.

THAT night-scene in Mr. Tregonnell's room made a curious impression upon Hester. She was angry with herself for dwelling upon it so continually, angry at the weakness of mind which made her look back upon the occurrence with a kind of superstitious horror. What was more natural than that a man should make his will? What more praiseworthy than that a grateful patient should reward his physician with a legacy? Could she blame Dr. Carrick for accepting such a boon? Assuredly not. Yet the memory of her kinsman's conduct that night troubled her. It seemed to her as if Mr. Tregonnell, though to all appearance a free agent, had been acting under the influence of the doctor.

She felt that to doubt Dr. Carrick's honour was to be guilty of base ingratitude, and hated herself for her formless suspicions.

"What would have become of me without his help?" she asked herself. "I might have starved."

Eustace Tregonnell said not a word about the will, and this puzzled her; for, as their friendship ripened, he had fallen into the habit of confiding all his thoughts to her attentive ear. He had told her much about himself of late. She had listened tearfully to his story of that early blight which had ruined his life—his first and only love.

"There was a time when I thought that I could never love again," he said to her one day; "but God is good, Hester, and now I begin to hope that even for me there may be some deep unspeakable joy waiting in the future. I would not hasten, or anticipate the hour of its coming. I would not rush impetuously to meet my fate. I would rather let my happiness come gently, by degrees, like the morning light. And those are the brightest days, you know, on which the dawn creeps over the hill-tops gradually, with no sudden burst of treacherous sunshine."

One afternoon the conversation turned unawares upon Dr. Carrick.

"I don't think I can ever be half grateful enough to him," exclaimed Mr. Tregonnell; "he has made a new man of me."

"There are few patients so grateful as you," said Hester.

"How do you mean?"

"Do you forget the will you made the other night?"

"What will? I make a will? Why, Hester, I never did such a thing in my life—I never even thought of such a thing, though I ought to think of it. If I were to die unmarried, my estate would go to some remote next-of-kin; some Mr. Snooks, perhaps, who would call himself Snooks Tregonnell, and come and lord it over my Cornish tenantry. The idea is hateful. I'll go up to Plymouth next week, see my lawyer, and make a will that shall, at any rate, shut out all possible Snookses."

Hester turned her face towards the rose-bush she was clipping, to hide her sudden pallor. All her doubts, all her fears, all her vague horror of that forgotten scene in Mr. Tregonnell's room, came back upon her with new force. In this quiet nature of hers there were latent powers which had never been exercised. This gentle creature was a woman of strong will. She determined to question Dr. Carrick, and get to the bottom of this mysterious business, at any risk of offending her benefactor.

Next morning, when she was pouring out

the tea at Dr. Carrick's early breakfast, she attacked the subject boldly.

"Do you know that Mr. Tregonnell denies that he ever made a will?" she said. "I happened to speak to him about it yesterday, by accident."

"You had no right to speak to him about it," exclaimed the doctor, white with anger—Hester had never seen such a look in his face before. "I told you that the subject was not to be mentioned."

"Not to other people, but my speaking of it to him could not matter."

"It does matter a great deal. Men are sensitive about such things. He chose to make his will, but he may not choose to be reminded of it."

"He most distinctly denied having made a will."

"He chose to deny it."

"What, he chose to tell a deliberate lie? No, Dr. Carrick; I would never believe that of Eustace Tregonnell."

"You would not believe, indeed; and pray what do you know of Eustace Tregonnell, or of psychology? What do you know of the eccentricities of the human intellect? Mr. Tregonnell is extremely eccentric. There are people who call him mad."

Hester was pale as death. Mad! That awful word froze her young blood. Might not that be indeed the clue to the mystery? She had heard Eustace Tregonnell acknowledge that will with the same lips which afterwards denied having made it. There could be no cheat, no juggle there. His own voice had declared the fact.

"If he is mad, the will is useless," she said.

"You are a clever lawyer, no doubt, young lady. I suppose you have never heard of testamentary capacity, which may exist in a patient subject to intervals of mania. A holograph will, executed by a madder man than Eustace Tregonnell, would stand against stronger opposition than is likely to be offered to any will of his."

"He is not mad," protested Hester. "His brain is as clear as mine."

"Very likely. He merely reproves your impertinence in speaking of a forbidden subject, by denying that he ever made a will."

Hester was more unhappy, after that conversation with Dr. Carrick, than she had been before. She had formed a high estimate of Mr. Tregonnell's character. The idea that he could tell a deliberate

falsehood was horrible to her. Yet it was almost worse to think of him as a madman. And who but a madman would have looked her calmly in the face, and denied a fact which she had seen with her eyes, and attested with her signature?

"If he is mad," she said to herself, "my poor woman's wit must keep watch for him."

And there, for the first time, a secret that had lain hidden in her heart for many days past came boldly forth into the light, and looked Hester Rushton in the face. She loved him—she, the obscure orphan, the dependant on a poor man's charity, blest with neither beauty nor accomplishments, a humble household drudge—she loved Eustace Tregonnell, the proudest and richest landowner in that part of the country. She blushed rosy-red, and hid her face from the bold glad sunlight, abashed and stricken by the discovery. How could she dare to lift her eyes to that perfect face, to think of Eustace Tregonnell as a being on the same level with her insignificant self?

"But I don't think of him as my equal," she said to herself; "not for worlds would I have him come down to my level. He is my bright particular star. I only want to look up to him, and worship him all the days of my life."

The idea of some evil mystery in that scene of the will haunted her perpetually. She began to have a horror of the house that sheltered her—that strange old house, with its long narrow passages, winding stairs, queer little closets, many doors, and ghostly reputation. She began to have a horror of her benefactor, Dr. Carrick. Dear as Eustace Tregonnell's society was to her, she longed for him to depart upon his yachting expedition.

Jane began with stormy winds and driving rains, and the yachting expedition was put off. Indeed, Mr. Tregonnell seemed in no hurry to leave St. Hildred House. He appeared perfectly happy, idling in the garden while Hester weeded her flower-beds, or reading to her while she worked in her favourite seat by a window that looked seaward.

One evening, however, he announced his intention of running up to Plymouth at the end of that week.

"I want to see my lawyer. Can you guess what I am going to do, Dr. Carrick?"

"I haven't the least idea," answered the doctor, sipping his tea.

Hester and the doctor were seated at

the lamplit tea-table. Mr. Tregonnell was standing with his back to the empty fireplace, looking down at them.

"I am going to make my will. It's a disagreeable operation, and reminds one unpleasantly of one's mortality. But I suppose every man ought to go through it. I shan't forget you, doctor; nor you, Hester. Let me see: a mourning ring, I suppose, will be an appropriate mark of my gratitude to you, doctor; and a silver thimble will form a pleasing memento of my friendship for you, Miss Rushton."

Dr. Carrick joined in Mr. Tregonnell's cheery laughter, but he cast a furtive glance at Hester, who sat looking downward, very pale in the lamplight.

CHAPTER VI. FOR LOVE AND LIFE.

ST. HILDERED HOUSE was said to be haunted. There was hardly an inhabitant of the village who would not have vouched for the fact. Noises had been heard; ghosts had been seen, at intervals, and by divers persons, ever since the oldest inhabitant's childhood. The exact form of the apparition, or the precise nature of the noises, was not easy to determine, since everyone gave a different description, and almost everyone's knowledge was derived from hearsay. Till very lately, Hester Rushton had laughed at these rumours, and had never known what it was to feel a thrill of fear in the musty old passages, or to shudder as the gathering twilight peopled the corners of the pannelled rooms with shadows. Now all was changed, she was nervous and apprehensive. She started at a shadow, and fancied she heard a human voice mixed with the night winds that sobbed in the wide old chimneys. One night she was disturbed by sounds that seemed distinctly human: heavy breathing, footsteps moving close to the head of her bed.

She started up, and lighted her candle, convinced that there was someone in the room. Yet she had bolted her door before going to bed.

The room was empty, but again she heard footsteps moving stealthily close at hand.

"The cupboard," she thought. "There is someone in that cupboard."

It was a long narrow cupboard, a kind of enclosed passage between her room and Mr. Tregonnell's. There was a third door in this cupboard, opening on to a corkscrew staircase, that led down to the servants' offices. But this staircase was rarely used,

the door leading into Mr. Tregonnell's room was never opened, and the cupboard was only a receptacle for disused and forgotten lumber.

Hester unlocked the cupboard, and looked in. A man was in the act of escaping by the door that opened on the staircase. She pursued him, candle in hand, her heart beating violently.

Something told her that this was Dr. Carrick, who had been paying a stealthy visit to his patient's room; but, to her surprise, on the first step of the stairs David Skelter turned and faced her, with his finger on his lip, and a look that implored her forbearance.

"Oh, please, miss, don't say anything. I'm not doing any harm."

"But why are you here—hiding in this cupboard—in the middle of the night?"

"It isn't the middle of the night, miss. I was uneasy about master."

"Why?"

"Well, miss, to be candid, I don't like the doctor's goings on. I've had my suspicions of him for a long time. It's too much like witchcraft, the power he's got over my master. It isn't natural you know, miss, and I happened to find out that he'd been putting it into people's heads that my master wasn't to be treated like a rational being, and that turned me against him, and made me think that there was something wrong going on."

"But what wrong can Dr. Carrick do your master, David?" asked Hester, with her earnest eyes searching the young man's face.

"Oh miss, can I trust you? Are you a friend or a foe?"

"I am a friend to Mr. Tregonnell, David; a sincere one."

"Yes, I believe it, miss; I've seen that, and I know something more. I know that he's a friend to you—more than a friend, nearer and dearer. He's been happier and better since he's known you. But I can't make the doctor out. He's too dark for me. Do you see that cupboard-door?" pointing to the door opening into Mr. Tregonnell's room. "The other morning, when I was putting away my master's things, it struck me that we might as well have the use of this cupboard. I tried the door, and found it locked inside. I could see the nozzle of the key in it. Then it struck me that this cupboard-door must communicate with some other room or passage, and then I remembered the door at the head of these stairs, which I'd

never seen open. I came round by the stairs, and examined the cupboard, and I found a little shutter or flap opening in that door—it had been made for ventilation, I suppose—through which I could look into my master's room. And that very night, feeling uneasy about him in my mind, after I'd gone up to bed, I crept down again, and looked through the little shutter to see if he was all right. And there I saw——"

"What, David? It was very wrong to play the spy upon your master."

"I saw the doctor conjuring him—bewitching him, miss."

"What do you mean?"

"So, miss—like this."

And David made solemn passes with his hands before Hester's face.

"He did that, miss, and sent master to sleep as quiet as a lamb. Now, I don't like to think that any man should have the power of sending my master to sleep."

Hester heard him in silence, deadly pale, breathless. She had the clue to the mystery now. It was mesmeric influence that composed the patient's restless mind to sleep; it was under mesmeric influence that Eustace Tregonnell had written and signed the will, of which in his waking state he knew nothing. Among the books which Mr. Tregonnell had brought her, and one which she had read with deepest interest, was Lord Lytton's "Strange Story." She had read also that thrilling story, by the same author, "The House and the Brain," and the doctrines of magnetic influence were not unknown to her. Dr. Carrick was just the kind of man—staid, passionless, self-contained—to exert such influence, to be familiar with that unholy art. He had used his power to get a will executed—a will which doubtless bestowed more upon him than the legacy he had spoken of to Hester. But that will would give him nothing so long as Eustace Tregonnell lived, and Eustace Tregonnell was at least eighteen years his junior. How remote must be the benefit which Dr. Carrick could hope for from that will. Again, it would be cancelled, mere waste-paper, the moment Mr. Tregonnell made another will, and he talked of doing so at the end of the week. All through the night Hester lay broad awake, thinking of Dr. Carrick, and trying to fathom his motive for a deed, which was, to her mind, as dark a crime as the worst forgery that had ever been perpetrated.

"The will is made, and he will be eager

to profit by it," she thought, with an icy thrill of horror creeping through her veins. "He is no longer interested in prolonging his patient's life. He must wish for his death, for he would not have committed this crime if he were not greedy of money. He will want to prevent Mr. Tregonnell's making a second will, and how is he to do that?"

How, save by the worst and last of crimes—secret murder?

A wild terror seized upon Hester, as she saw herself face to face with this hideous thought. The idea, having once taken hold of her, was not to be thrust out of her mind. How else, but by Eustace Tregonnell's speedy death, could the doctor profit by his crime? His profession gave him a fatal power. He had the keys of life and death in his hand, and Eustace trusted him with blind unquestioning faith.

"I will not leave him in a secret enemy's hand," she thought; "I will tell him everything to-morrow. I owed gratitude and affection to my cousin, while I believed him a good and honourable man. I owe nothing to a traitor."

She rose at her usual early hour, with a torturing headache, and hands burning with fever. She was startled when she saw her altered face in the glass.

"I hope I am not going to be ill," she said to herself, "just when I want the utmost strength and clearness of mind."

It was an effort to dress, an effort to crawl downstairs, and take her place at the breakfast-table. She was obliged to omit those small duties which had been her daily task—the finishing touches to the dusting and polishing of the furniture, the arrangement of a bowl of freshly-cut flowers for the table.

The day was hopelessly wet, a dull gray sky, a straight downpour, that shut out everything except the sullen waste of leaden sea, crested with long lines of livid whiteness. There was no chance of Mr. Tregonnell going to Plymouth on such a day as this.

Dr. Carrick looked curiously at his cousin's pale face, but said not a word. Mr. Tregonnell, who rarely appeared so early, joined them before the doctor had finished his first cup of tea.

He was not slow to perceive that something was wrong with Hester.

"Good heavens, Miss Rushton, how ill you are looking!" he exclaimed.

"I do not feel very well. I had a wakeful night."

"Why, what should keep you awake?" asked Dr. Carrick, looking sharply up at her.

"I hardly know. My mind was full of queer fancies. That awful story haunted me, the story you read to me a few days ago, Mr. Tregonnell."

"Well, it is rather uncanny," answered Eustace; "I am so sorry I read it to you. I ought to have considered that your nerves would be more sensitive than mine. I read it to you merely as a work of art, a masterpiece of graphic style."

"I was very foolish to think of it as a reality," said Hester.

Dr. Carrick laid his fingers on her wrist.

"You had better go to bed, and stay there, if you don't want to be seriously ill," he said; "you are in a high fever, as it is."

"Impossible," answered Hester, "I have all sorts of things to do."

"Of course. A woman always fancies the earth will stop, if she takes her hand off the machinery that makes it go round. I am sure you can have nothing to do to-day, that can't be as well done to-morrow. If it's a question of dinner, that clever fellow, Skelton, will cook for you. If it's any fiddle-faddle about the house, a muslin curtain to be ironed, or a chintz chair-cover to be mended, let it stand over till you are well. I shall be at home all day, if I'm wanted. I've no urgent cases, and it would be too cruel to take a horse out of his stable unnecessarily on such a day as this."

Hester remembered many such days on which Dr. Carrick had spared neither himself nor his horse. She was obliged to submit to his orders, and go back to bed, for she was really too ill to resist him. She laid herself down dressed upon the outside of the counterpane, with her thick winter shawl wrapped round her; for although her head and hands were burning, a feeling of deathlike cold crept over her at intervals.

It seemed the longest day she had ever lived through. The ceaseless drip of the rain upon the leaves of the sycamore, whose spreading branches obscured half her window, the unchanging gray of the sky, the sullen murmur of the sea—all added to her gloom of mind. She would have given worlds to have seen Eustace Tregonnell alone, to have told him all she had discovered, all she feared; but she felt powerless to rise from her bed, and, even if she could muster strength and

courage to go downstairs in quest of Mr. Tregonnell, she knew that Dr. Carrick was on guard below, and would do his utmost to prevent her being alone with his patient. There was nothing for her to do but to lie there with aching head and anxious mind, waiting for night.

The good-natured maid-of-all-work came to her several times in the course of the day, bringing her broth which she could not touch, and divers cups of tea, which were welcome to her parched lips. She ate nothing all day, but drank deep draughts of cold water. Night came at last. She heard the doors shutting below, and footsteps ascending the stairs. How well she knew each footfall! The doctor's soft deliberate step; David Skelter's tread, quick yet heavy; Mr. Tregonnell's firm light step; the maid-of-all-work's slipshod accent. And then all was quiet. The church clock struck ten. The rain was still falling. There was not a star in the sky.

Hester lifted her head with an effort from the pillow where it had lain so heavily all day long. She crawled to her door, and noiselessly set it ajar, so slightly, that anyone passing would hardly notice that it was not shut. Then she opened the door of the closet. The light in Mr. Tregonnell's room shone brightly through the crevices in the sliding shutter. Then she crept back to the room-door and listened with all her might.

After about ten minutes she heard the doctor's step coming along the passage from his own room. He knocked softly at Mr. Tregonnell's door, was told to enter, and entered. Before the door closed, Hester heard the patient say:

"Upon my word, doctor, I don't believe I need your ministrations to-night. I feel honestly sleepy."

Here the door was firmly shut, and on this side Hester could hear no more.

She went quietly back to the closet, and drew near the sliding shutter. At the same moment the door leading to the servant's staircase was cautiously opened, and David Skelter crept in.

All was dark in the closet. It was by intuition only that Hester knew the intruder. One rash exclamation from him and she was betrayed. She put one hand over his mouth, grasping his wrist firmly with the other, and whispered in his ear:

"Not a word! not a movement! I am going to watch with you to-night." And then, with infinite caution, she slid back

the shutter for about an inch, and looked into the room.

Eustace Tregonnell was lying outside the bed, wrapped in his long velvet dressing gown, in an attitude of supreme repose. Dr. Carrick was seated beside the bed, his hands moving slowly in mesmeric passes before the patient's dreamy eyes. In less than a quarter of an hour Mr. Tregonnell had sunk into a mesmeric sleep, profound, peaceful, deathlike.

So far there was no wrong done. The patient was consentient; mesmerism had exerted a healing influence over mind and body; mesmerism had been Dr. Carrick's only treatment.

"That's all, miss," whispered David. "He'll go away now, and leave master to sleep it out. It's against nature that one man should be able to send another to sleep, and I don't like it."

"There is no harm in it, David," replied Hester.

But the doctor did not leave his patient. He withdrew from the bed, and stood, with his back to the mantelpiece, intently watchful of the sleeper. This lasted for more than five minutes; Hester still watching from the shutter, David close at her side.

And now Dr. Carrick crept stealthily across the room to the dressing-table, opened the medicine-chest, and took out a bottle.

"It's the chloroform, miss," whispered David. "I know the bottle."

This word chloroform awakened a vague fear in Hester's mind. She felt as if she were on the threshold of some hideous discovery.

"David," she whispered, close in the valet's ear, "run down softly, as fast as you can go, open the street-door, and ring the bell. Quick, quick!"

The man obeyed without understanding her. His shoeless feet ran swiftly down the stairs.

Dr. Carrick went back to the bed, took the stopper out of the bottle, and deliberately poured the whole of the contents on Eustace Tregonnell's pillow. The patient lay on his side with his face towards the fireplace. The doctor sprinkled the chloroform exactly under his nostrils. Then with a delicate hand, as carefully as if he had been covering the face of a sick child, for whom sleep was the sole chance of cure, he drew the light coverlet over Eustace Tregonnell's head, and stood looking down at the shrouded figure with an evil smile on his face.

In the next instant the street-door bell was ringing violently.

"Great Heaven! who can it be at such a time?" cried the doctor, hurrying from the room, with a backward uneasy glance at the bed.

Hester unlocked the closet-door, and rushed into Mr. Tregonnell's room as the doctor disappeared. She threw back the coverlet from the sleeper's face, snatched the pillow from under his head, dashed cold water over head and face, flung open the window to the cool, moist, night air, all without loss of an instant. She, who all day had been powerless to lift her head from the pillow, seemed in those terrible moments endowed with unnatural strength.

Eustace stirred, faintly at first; then, as Hester dashed more water into his face, his eyes slowly opened, he gave a struggling sigh, and at last raised his head and looked at her, with eyes that expressed only vague wonder.

"What are you doing?" he asked. "What is the matter?"

"I think I have saved your life," she said quietly; and then, her brain suddenly reeling, she fell in a heap on the floor beside his bed, not unconscious, only giddy and helpless.

Dr. Carrick came back, saw his intended victim sitting up with his eyes open, and his cousin on the ground by the bed. A glance told him that the game was lost. He did not understand how it had happened—how Hester came there—but he knew that his scheme was a failure.

"What the devil have you been doing to me, Dr. Carrick?" asked Eustace, not in the most amiable mood after awakening from deepest unconsciousness to find himself in a pool of water. "Have you been experimenting in hydropathy? And, good Heavens! what an odour of chloroform! My shirt must have been drenched with it."

"You were restless, and I sprinkled a few drops on your pillow. In the name of decency, Hester, what are you doing here?"

The girl rose to her feet, steadied herself with a great effort, and looked her kinsman full in the face. David Skelton had followed the doctor upstairs, and stood on the threshold, ready to rush to his master's aid the moment he was wanted.

"I know all that has happened to-night," said Hester, with those steady eyes on the doctor's face. "I saw all—David and I—we were both watching you through the little shutter in that closet-door. You

forgot that shutter, did you not? I saw you empty the bottle of chloroform on the pillow, and draw the coverlet over your patient's head. You were trying to suffocate him. I suppose suffocation of that kind leaves no trace. You have got your patient's will—the will that leaves you everything, no doubt; and all you wanted was to get rid of your patient. You have failed this time. David, take care of your master—neither his property nor his life are safe in this house."

"Devil!" cried the doctor, beside himself. "Liar! Dirt that I picked up out of the gutter—a pauper who must have begged or starved but for my help! A pretty story to hatch against me, forsooth! Mr. Tregonnell, David, I call you both to witness that this woman is either a lunatic or the most outrageous liar that ever drew the breath of life."

"This woman is my future wife," said Eustace Tregonnell, rising from the bed, and supporting Hester's tottering figure with his arm. "Yes, Hester, you will let it be so, will you not? I offer you the life you have saved. It is no new thought, love; it has been my pleasant day-dream for a month past. David, you scoundrel, pack my portmanteau this instant. Dr. Carrick, I shall have the felicity of leaving your hospitable abode early to-morrow, but I shall take Miss Rushton with me, and find a more desirable residence for her with our good old vicar and his family, until the church can make her mistress of Tregonnell Manor. Now, Hester, my dear, go back to your room, and lock your door. I don't think Dr. Carrick will try his chloroform treatment on you; he knows that David and I understand him."

The baffled villain stood, pale, silent, scarcely breathing—an image of humanity frozen into marble. Then he roused himself slowly, gave a profound sigh, and walked to the door.

On the threshold he turned, and looked steadily at his patient.

"The night I first saw you I was inclined to think you a madman, Mr. Tregonnell," he said deliberately; "now I know that you are one. I shall be heartily glad to get rid of such a dangerous inmate. My house is not certified for the reception of lunatics; and if your habits were known, I should get into trouble. Take care of your master, David. He'll want a strait-waistcoat before you have been much longer in his service."

"That's a lie, and you know it," David retorted bluntly.

Mr. Tregonnell took Hester to the vicarage early next morning. He told the vicar everything, and confided the young lady to his friendly care, pending her marriage. The vicar had a comfortable wife, and grown-up daughters; and Hester spent a month among these new friends—a month that was like one long dream of delight, for did not Eustace Tregonnell dedicate all his days to her society?

St. Hildred House was left empty within a few hours of Mr. Tregonnell's departure. The maid-of-all-work was paid and dismissed without warning. Dr. Carrick told her that he had a letter from London which obliged him to leave St. Hildred without an hour's delay. A rich relative was dying, a relative likely to leave Dr. Carrick a handsome fortune.

This fiction decently covered the doctor's retreat. He was soon lost in the labyrinth he knew so well. Despair had fastened its grip upon his soul. He had tried honesty; he had tried fraud and crime. Both had failed.

"I am one of those unlucky mortals born to fail," he told himself. "Neither God nor the devil will help me."

Dr. Carrick made another appeal to the devil. He started in a disreputable neighbourhood as a practitioner of the lowest order—a practitioner who stuck at nothing. For a time things went well with him, and he made money. Then came a scandal, imprisonment, disgrace; and Dr. Carrick went down to the very bottom of the social gulf, never to rise again.

For Hester and her lover life holds nothing but happiness. They spend six months of every year cruising in the brightest waters, anchoring by the fairest shores, and the rest of their days at Tregonnell Manor, where, being wealthy and generous, they are universally beloved.

OUR SENSATION AT UNTER-BÄDELI.

BY FRANCES ELEANOR TROLLOPE.

CHAPTER I.

We were a very select society. At least, that was what we called ourselves—"select," though I don't know by what rule we were selected, nor who selected us. But never mind! We were recognised as being a very select society, and we were justly proud of the distinction.

We were rather too few for some people's taste. Mrs. Ruddiman, for instance, the stout widow, was heard to declare that the dreary stretch of white cloth and empty chairs at our table-d'hôte, with a handful of guests huddled together at one end, made her so low-spirited, that she used to go to her own room every day after dinner, and cry over a photograph of the late Mr. Ruddiman, which she wore in a brooch. I don't know whether it was true; but one thing is certain, Mrs. Ruddiman removed herself very shortly to the Hôtel du Rütli, up the street, where we could see the lights flaring until quite late at night—to a quarter past ten o'clock very often!—and could hear such a gabble of voices, and the jingling old piano, and sometimes a fiddle—for they danced at the Rütli in a promiscuous unceremonious kind of way. We thought the Rütli very low, to tell the truth; and many of us wondered how Mrs. Ruddiman could bear to leave the select society of the Hôtel et Pension des Alpes for that. But Miss Hawk said that Mr. Ruddiman had been a meat-salesman, and what could you expect?

Miss Hawk came of a very good family—she frequently said so herself—and her manners were very commanding. So was her figure. She measured five feet eight inches in her stockings: that was the phrase she always used. I think I never saw so upright a figure as Miss Hawk's. It was not a plump figure. You could not conscientiously call it so. At the same time we thought it coarse in Mrs. Ruddiman to express herself as she did about it: "A back-board stuck flat against a broomstick." But of course if it was true that Mr. Ruddiman had been a meat-salesman, why—!

I think that on the whole we considered Miss Hawk to be the leader of our society. And I am almost sure that she considered herself to be so. It was not only amongst us English that Miss Hawk was looked up to. There were several Swiss in the Hôtel des Alpes, who paid her great attention. They were ladies and gentlemen—at least a gentleman—from Lausanne, and the neighbourhood of the Lake of Geneva; and they were naturally attracted to Miss Hawk by her proficiency in the French language, which she spoke with remarkable fluency. I did notice occasionally that they did not appear to understand what she said, all at once. And certainly her French sounded very